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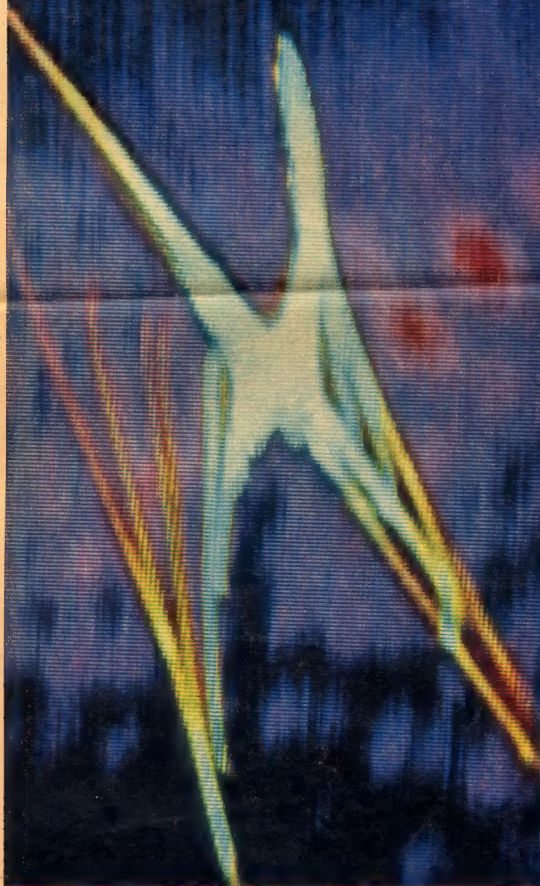
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TV IS AN ART FORM, TOO/PAGE 4



A NEW LOOK AT TV

By Mary Lynn Coyle



In most art forms it is easy to find artists who regard their work as a creation of abstract expression and not just a means of simply recreating the world.

Eric Somers, associate director of communication arts at Creighton University, has been working for several years on abstract ways to communicate with television. He believes television need not be limited to simply transmitting images as seen by our eyes. The medium can be used to create images of great beauty and interest.

Somers uses light from a laser and electronic signals to create images not usually seen on television. He makes videotapes consisting of images produced by electronic circuits, by lasers and by devices which modify and change the pictures made by conventional television cameras.

He has become a leader in the field of experimental television and has lectured before audiences in most major cities in the United States and Canada. He has received requests about his design systems from several European television networks.

Much of Somers' work is done in three areas. To create electronically generated images, he uses a signal synthesizer, which is really a small computer, to generate electronic signals. The results are various electronic wave forms and designs that move in and out.

His second method is to electronically modify images. "Starting with the image on a conventional studio camera, I modify it by shifting gray scale and color relationships, using high contrast effects, creating image lag or smear, or using other techniques to transform a conventional image into a semi-real art form."

He also creates laser-generated television images through optical systems.

Another area of Somers' experimentation is holography, the recording and reconstruction of three-dimensional images with a laser beam. He will teach a special workshop on holography this summer at Creighton.

The images Somers produces are moving images. During the course of a video piece the images blend with each other and create a constantly moving effect.

Somers classifies himself as a communications designer and not a video artist. "Of course, some of the work I do could be classified as art, but I am not interested in the way art communicates. I think we have to consider art as a form of communication," he said.

"Up to now, television has been mostly used to copy the work of our eyes and to allow us to see people and events without having to travel from our living rooms. I want to explore all the possibilities of television communication."

Somers has had to develop much of his own equipment. He and Jon Olerich, Creighton's television technician, have designed new circuits and adapted other equipment for elec-

Eric Somers of Creighton University sees television as an art object — not the programs themselves, of course, but the screen images. And he creates his own images. The one at far left, opposite page, is electronically generated, the dancer and the hand are electronically modified. He is shown on this page with some of his equipment.



tronic image generation. For example, he has used a music synthesizer to generate voltages to produce and control images on a television screen.

The optics associated with his laser television work were developed to produce interesting patterns on the face of a vidicon tube, the image pick-up tube in a television camera.

He has also explored the image-modifying possibilities of types of commercially produced television equipment. The pictures of the dancer were produced by a video quantizer loaned to him by a Colorado

firm. "This device takes an ordinary black and white picture and produces contoured color effects," he said.

SOMERS has one of the most advanced electronic image systems yet developed. He believes he is the first person to use lasers in a television design system.

He is carrying on Creighton's tradition of television innovation. In 1971, Somers taught the first university course on experimental television techniques.

In the 1940s, the Rev. R. C. Williams, S.J., director of communication arts, assisted in training WOW engineers and production personnel in the rudiments of television. Creighton was the first college to pro-

duce educational television programs using professional television equipment in 1946. The first dental operation ever televised originated from the campus.

Somers manages the university's closed circuit television system and teaches several broadcasting courses. Last summer he was workshop director for the First National Videotape Festival in Minneapolis. In April, he was video consultant to the Omaha Flow Systems Show at Joslyn Art Museum, where he showed the equipment used to produce his electronic images.